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McKenzie River National Recreation Trail

Willamette National Forest

United States Department of Agriculture

Forest Service
Pacific Northwest Region

A 13.13:

Highlights Along the McKenzie River National Recreation Trail

Old Santiam Wagon Road

The Old Santiam Wagon Road was the first route constructed through the Santiam Pass and became an early link between mid-Willamette Valley communities and lands in central and eastern Oregon. The route was first explored in 1859 by Andrew Wiley, John Bradenburg, and John Gray, who spent several months bushwhacking from the Sweet Home area to the Deschutes River.

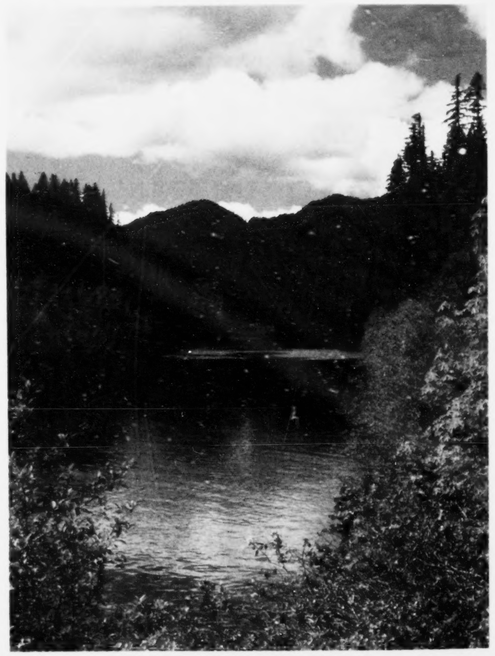
By 1863, roadwork sufficient to allow passage for horse-drawn wagons was completed, and several way stations were established at one-day travel intervals to facilitate safe passage. One of the more well-known stations was located at Fish Lake. Several of these old buildings remain, and the Fish Lake site is still used by the Forest Service as a summer pack station.

Hundreds of settlers completed the journey through the rugged terrain, often in treacherous winter weather. The grave at Fish Lake of Charity Ann Marks, who died in childbirth in 1875, attests to the hardships they suffered.

Today Highway 20 replaces the historic route, but many remnants of the Old Santiam Wagon Road remain. Some of the best evidence of the original route lies along the portion which leads eastward from the end of the McKenzie River Trail toward Sand Mountain. This portion of the old route is a convenient means to reach the Pacific Crest National Scenic Trail from the McKenzie River National Recreation Trail, a distance of about 7 miles.

Water Power

The trail passes by several facilities which are part of the Carmen-Smith Hydroelectric Development, a supplementary power source which meets the water needs of Eugene, Oregon, and surrounding communities. The project was completed in 1963 and includes Trail Bridge, Smith, and Carmen Reservoirs.



Trail Bridge

Carmen Reservoir collects water from the McKenzie River and diverts it 2 miles underground to Smith Reservoir. The water is then diverted back to the power plant at the north end of Trail Bridge Reservoir.

One of the features of the hydroelectric project visible from the trail is the artificial spawning channel for chinook salmon located immediately downstream from Trail Bridge Dam. The spawning channel was developed by the Eugene Water & Electric Board in cooperation with the State Fish Commission and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service.

Valley of Lava

The section of the McKenzie River National Recreation Trail from Trail Bridge Reservoir to Clear Lake traverses an area which has undergone several violent transformations in the recent geologic past. Approximately 3,500 years ago, lava oozing from the vents of nearby Nash Crater dammed the ancestral McKenzie River, forming a swampy area now known as Lava Lake. These same movements also dammed Hackleman Creek creating what is now known as Fish Lake. Because of their extremely porous lava bottoms, both Fish Lake and Lava Lake, full from spring snow melt each year, completely dry up and turn into dry meadows in a matter of a few weeks.

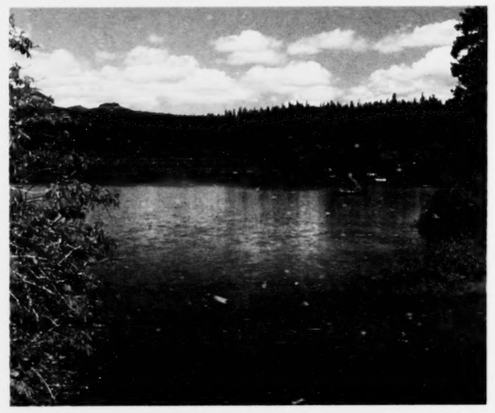
The course of the McKenzie River was further altered when lava, flowing southwest from Belknap Crater near McKenzie Pass, poured over earlier flows, plunging into the McKenzie Canyon into what is now known as Tamolitch Valley. This activity occurred about 1,600 years ago and created the area along the trail known as Beaver Marsh. More significantly, the lava caused the river, which once flowed freely through an open canyon, to be gradually absorbed into its new bed of porous lava rock. As one hikes through the Tamolitch Valley portion of the trail, the remains of the old lava flow and the many meandering stream channels it caused are still evident. Except for times of heavy run-off, Tamolitch Valley remains a dry water course. The McKenzie River reemerges at Tamolitch Pool, approximately 2 miles north of Trail Bridge Reservoir.

The lava which lines the valley contains many lava tubes and trenches formed by trees which fell into the cooling lava. Also, tree casts were formed on the western edge of the flow when lava cooled around the tree trunks before the wood completely burned away. These casts are 1 to 5 feet in diameter and 6 to 15 feet deep. Most of them are vertical and widen downward. Although lava is common to this area of the Cascade Range, tree casts are relatively unique. The lava had sufficient fluidity to form the mold, yet not disturb or fill the cast once the tree had been burned away.

Clear Lake

The trail skirts along the entire eastern shoreline of Clear Lake. The lake, named for its exceptionally blue clear water, is the present-day source of the McKenzie River. Prior to the volcanic activity, which began several thousand years ago, the source of the McKenzie River was believed to be several miles to the northeast, closer to the Cascade crest. About 3,000 years ago, lava flowing from nearby Sand Mountain dammed the McKenzie River and created Clear Lake.

As the valley behind the lava dam filled up, many large trees were submerged in the extremely cold water. Many of



Clear Lake

these trees are still visible beneath the lake's surface, especially toward its north end. Scientists attribute the remarkable preservation of these ancient trees to the cold, mineral-free water and the gentle currents of the lake. Wood cores from these trees have been given a radiocarbon age of approximately 2,950 years.

At the southeast end of the lake, water flows through a short channel which ends abruptly at the edge of the lava flow that dammed the valley. At the end of the channel are tunnel-shaped sink holes partially filled with driftwood. At high-water stages, the lake drains through these holes, with the water traveling underground through porous lava rock and emerging in the channel above Sahalie Falls.

Clear Lake has a maximum depth of 195 feet. The lake is fed by springs which average 43° F. These springs are presumed outlets of the buried upper portion of the McKenzie River. One of the largest visible springs is Great Springs, which can be seen from the trail on the northeast side of Clear Lake.

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McKENZIE RIVER NATIONAL RECREATION TRAIL

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE
FOREST SERVICE
R. MAX PETERSON, Chief

WILLAMETTE NATIONAL FOREST
OREGON

McKENZIE RANGER DISTRICT
1985

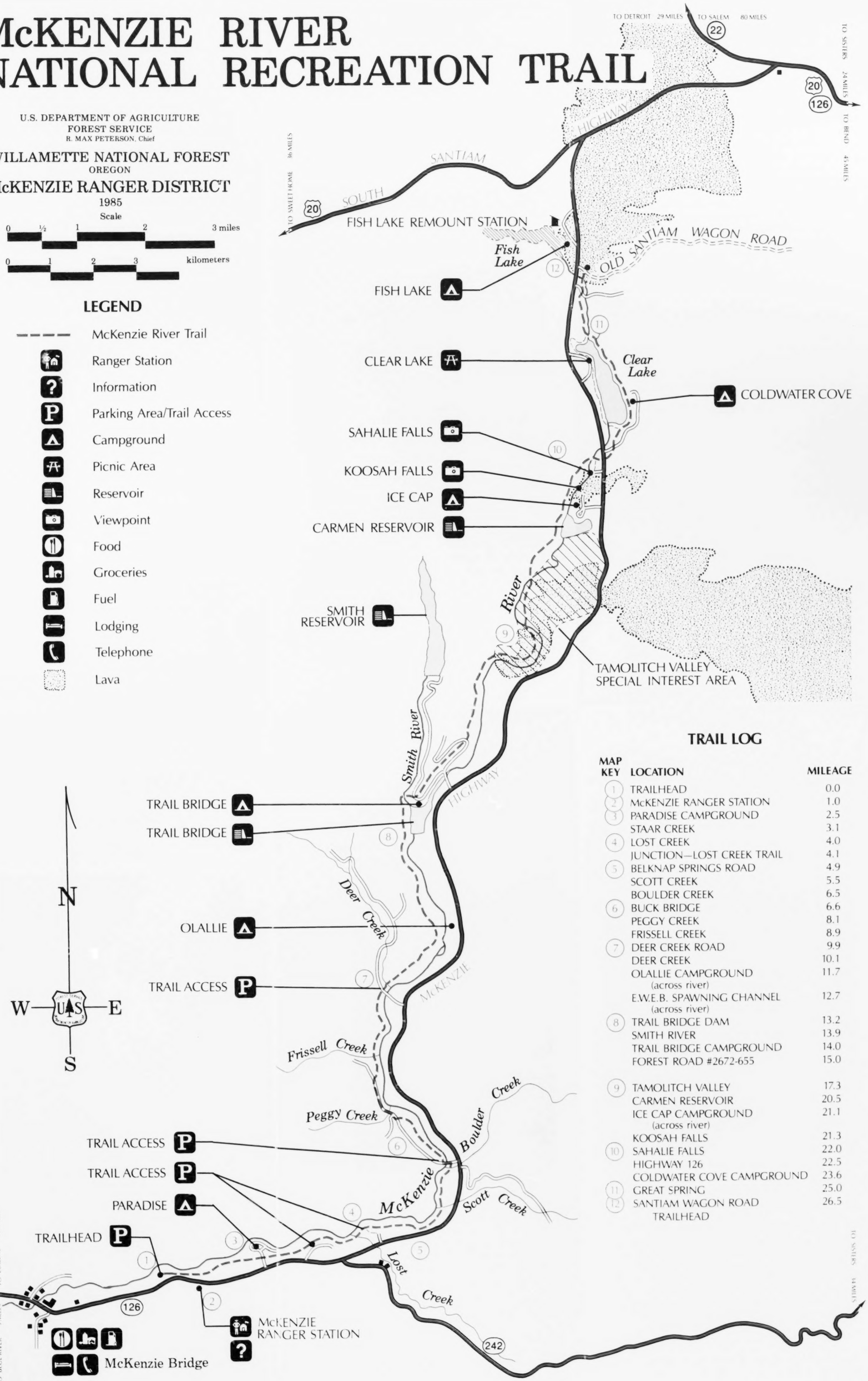
Scale

0 ½ 1 2 3 miles

0 1 2 3 kilometers

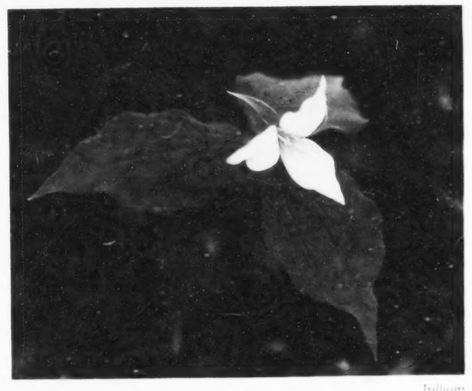
LEGEND

- McKenzie River Trail
- Ranger Station
- Information
- Parking Area/Trail Access
- Campground
- Picnic Area
- Reservoir
- Viewpoint
- Food
- Groceries
- Fuel
- Lodging
- Telephone
- Lava



TRAIL LOG

MAP KEY	LOCATION	MILEAGE
1	TRAILHEAD	0.0
2	McKENZIE RANGER STATION	1.0
3	PARADISE CAMPGROUND	2.5
	STAAR CREEK	3.1
4	LOST CREEK	4.0
	JUNCTION—LOST CREEK TRAIL	4.1
5	BELKNAP SPRINGS ROAD	4.9
	SCOTT CREEK	5.5
	BOULDER CREEK	6.5
6	BUCK BRIDGE	6.6
	PEGGY CREEK	8.1
	FRISSELL CREEK	8.9
7	DEER CREEK ROAD	9.9
	DEER CREEK	10.1
	OLALLIE CAMPGROUND (across river)	11.7
	E.W.E.B. SPAWNING CHANNEL (across river)	12.7
8	TRAIL BRIDGE DAM	13.2
	SMITH RIVER	13.9
	TRAIL BRIDGE CAMPGROUND	14.0
	FOREST ROAD #2672-655	15.0
9	TAMOLITCH VALLEY	17.3
	CARMEN RESERVOIR	20.5
	ICE CAP CAMPGROUND (across river)	21.1
	KOOSAH FALLS	21.3
10	SAHALIE FALLS	22.0
	HIGHWAY 126	22.5
	COLDWATER COVE CAMPGROUND	23.6
11	GREAT SPRING	25.0
12	SANTIAM WAGON ROAD TRAILHEAD	26.5



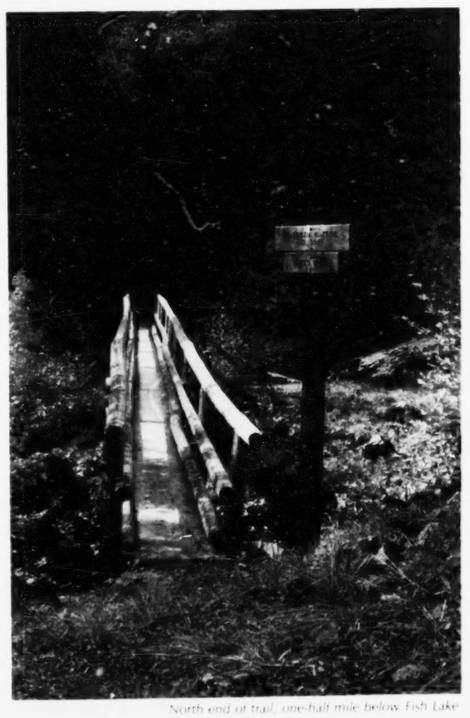
Trillium

National Recreation Trails

National Recreation Trails have been designated under the National Trails Systems Act to provide recreation opportunities in scenic areas accessible to population centers.

The McKenzie River National Recreation Trail is managed by the Willamette National Forest to provide the hiker an opportunity for a refreshing trek beside the famous McKenzie River. It has been located and constructed to serve foot travelers only. Motorized vehicles and pack saddle stock are prohibited.

Do not smoke while traveling; stop at a safe place and completely snuff out your smoke before leaving. Campfires should be constructed only in existing fire-rings. Carefully extinguish your fire with water. Do not bury live fire with dirt—it may smolder and break out later.



North end of trail, one-half mile below Fish Lake

Please pack out your litter. Barrels or garbage cans are provided at nearby campgrounds and some trailheads. Leave a clean trail for others to enjoy. Please do not cut trees or collect plants or wildflowers.

WALK SOFTLY ON THE LAND.

For more information, please contact the:

McKenzie Ranger Station
McKenzie Bridge, OR 97413
Phone: (503) 822-3381

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The Falls

Sahalie

Sahalie Falls is regarded as the most magnificent waterfalls on the McKenzie River. The water plunges 100 feet over a lava dam and then tumbles another 40 feet in a series of beautiful cascades. The name "Sahalie" is derived from Chinook jargon meaning "high."

Koosah Falls

Koosah

"Koosah," derived from the Chinook jargon word meaning "sky" or "heaven," is a spectacular 70-foot waterfalls. A few springs flow from crevices at the base of the falls, but the cavernous basalt over which the falls plunge suggests there may be a larger spring at flood stages.

Tamolitch

One rarely sees water flow through the moss-covered river bed and over this 60-foot cliff face except at unusually high-level water stages. The water source for the crystalline pool is an underground flow which appears at the base of the cliff. Water sometimes can be seen burbling from a rock a few feet above the surface of the pool. The name "Tamolitch" is derived from a Chinook jargon word meaning "bucket" or "tub."

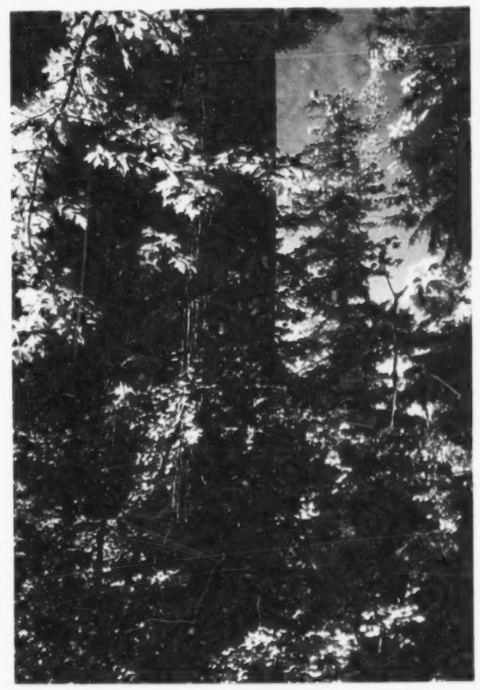
Trail Information

The McKenzie River Trail provides camping, fishing, photography, exploring, wildlife viewing, and just plain ol' sitting by one of the prettiest rivers in the Pacific Northwest. The trail begins approximately 1.5 miles east of the community of McKenzie Bridge and meanders along the upper McKenzie River for nearly 27 miles, ending near the river's headwaters at Clear Lake. The trail climbs from the 1,450-foot elevation to nearly 3,200 feet.

Rhododendron along the trail

The McKenzie River, a major tributary of the Willamette River, is a scenic whitewater river which originates in the Cascade high country between the Mt. Jefferson and Mt. Washington Wildernesses. As the trail winds its way along the banks of the McKenzie, it crosses several side canyons via log bridges, many of them hewn from mammoth logs. The lower sections of the trail pass through stands of old-growth Douglas-fir. As the trail climbs to the upper reaches of the river canyon, it passes spectacular waterfalls caused by ancient lava flows.

A variety of plant life can be found along the trail. Mountain hemlock, madrone, red cedar, and dogwood accompany stands of Douglas-fir. All along the trail, particularly the lower stretches, the state flower, Oregon grape, grows in abundance. Salal, several varieties of huckleberry, rhododendron, and numerous wildflowers can also be seen along the trail. Vine maple and other hardwoods add their red and gold brilliance to the river valley each fall.



Multi-hued maples

There are 11 parking areas scattered along Highway 126 which provide access to the trail. The proximity of the trail to the highway and various crossroads makes it possible to plan outings that range from short walks to treks lasting several days. The trail passes by Paradise, Trail Bridge, and Coldwater Cove Campgrounds for those who plan overnight stops. Water is available in these campgrounds usually from Memorial Day through Labor Day.

The terrain is relatively gentle, however hiking boots are recommended when traveling through the old lava flows. Portions of the trail, typically the lower 8 or 10 miles, remain snow-free and are suitable for year-around use.

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